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AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 WARSAW 000328

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (ADDED ADDRESSEE)

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/CE (PIERANGELO, LOCHMAN, YEAGER)
DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/OHI FOR KENNEDY

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TAGS: PREL PHUM IS XF PL

SUBJECT: POLAND: ISRAELI AMBASSADOR PESSIMISTIC ON
RESTITUTION

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Classified By: CDA Quanrud, for reasons 1.4 (b, d)

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: Outgoing Israeli Ambassador David Peleg lamented Polish disengagement from Mideast peacekeeping missions due to the focus on Afghanistan and suggested that the Poles should keep a more open mind about the incoming Israeli government. In his view, Prime Minister Tusk may have lost interest in property restitution legislation since it could hurt him in next year's presidential campaign, and President Kaczynski's views on restitution are unclear. Peleg confirmed that the Prime Minister's advisor Wladyslaw Bartoszewski will head the Polish delegation to the Prague Conference on Holocaust Assets in June, but suggested that Bartoszewski has little interest in restitution. The Poles take note when the U.S. fails to raise restitution in high-level meetings -- Peleg expressed his personal view that the U.S. miscalculates when it avoids discussing such sensitive issues. END SUMMARY.

¶12. (C) In a March 26 farewell call with Charge, Israeli Ambassador David Peleg expressed concern that the GoP is downgrading its engagement in the Middle East, ending participation in peace-keeping missions in Lebanon and the Golan Heights in order to consolidate efforts in Afghanistan. Peleg said Polish officials keep complaining about Israeli Foreign Minister-designate Avigdor Lieberman; he said some compare him to Polish extremist Roman Giertych, as a politician who should similarly be quarantined. Peleg said he reminds the Poles that Lieberman favors a two-state solution in Palestine, and urges them to judge the incoming government by its deeds.

¶13. (C) Peleg said Israel agrees with the GoP's general approach to property restitution -- treating it as a Polish, not Jewish matter -- but he sees few prospects for progress. He said Prime Minister Tusk appears to have concluded that the restitution issue, like other controversial domestic issues he has avoided, will not help him in his 2010 presidential run. He said the Prime Minister's advisor, Wladyslaw Bartoszewski, appears to have no interest in getting involved in restitution, although he will be the GoP representative to the Prague Holocaust Assets Conference in June, which will cover restitution as one of five topics. (Note: Peleg will participate in that conference, in his post-retirement position as director of the World Jewish Restitution Organization.) In any event, Peleg said, Bartoszewski appears to have no access to the Prime Minister except on Polish-German issues. Peleg said there are conflicting reports about whether President Lech Kaczynski would sign restitution legislation, although the views of his

brother, opposition leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski, would likely influence his decision.

¶4. (C) Peleg said the GoP could square the circle on a difficult issue, providing symbolic compensation without bankrupting the treasury, if it were willing to engage Jewish stakeholders. He also suggested that the U.S. Government has not pushed the issue in high-level meetings, and Poles have taken notice. Peleg said senior U.S. officials told him that they were reluctant to raise restitution at a time when the U.S. was working hard to win Polish approval of Missile Defense. Speaking personally, Peleg said he thought that was a miscalculation.

¶5. (C) Deputy Prime Minister and Economy Minister Pawlak has come up with some promising ideas for financing restitution, according to Peleg. Pawlak reportedly favors selling former Jewish properties to which no heirs can lay claim, and using the funds to compensate heirs of other properties. On the issue of heirs, Peleg criticized the current draft of restitution legislation for failing to provide compensation to anyone beyond direct descendants of former property owners.

¶6. (C) Anti-Semitic violence and vandalism is relatively uncommon in Poland, Peleg agreed, but there are persistent social prejudices, some of which fall into the category of folklore. He drew attention to negative attitudes at the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN), which is preparing for Polish-Israeli academic conferences and appears ready to sign an archival research agreement with the U.S. Holocaust Museum. Peleg said the Institute's director, Janusz Kurtyka, brought to IPN officials and historians who might be characterized as something between extreme rightists and anti-Semites. He suggested IPN may be reinforcing the myth of "Judeo-Communism" (Zydokomuna), and noted IPN's false public claims that the Bielski Brothers had massacred Polish civilians. (The Bielskis were Jewish World War II partisans

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featured in the movie, "Defiance.")

COMMENT

¶7. (C) Peleg is understandably disappointed that the end of his five years has come without the passage of restitution legislation and with simmering problems on the commemoration front as well. That said, Polish Treasury Ministry officials responsible for shepherding the legislation through the interministerial clearance process insist the legislation is moving forward -- albeit more slowly than the GoP originally anticipated. According to the Israeli DCM, Polish FM Sikorski offered similar assurances in Peleg's farewell call. It may even be that Tusk is looking to show some progress on the issue in advance of his hoped-for trip to the White House this spring, but both trip and legislation seem far from certain at this point.

QUANRUD